



# Higher Education Review of The Royal Veterinary College

February 2015

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## About this review

This is a report of a Higher Education Review conducted by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) at The Royal Veterinary College. The review took place from 16 to 18 February 2015 and was conducted by a team of four reviewers, as follows:

- Mr Stephen Finch
- Ms Barbara Howell
- Professor Denis Wright
- Mr David Messling (student reviewer)

The main purpose of the review was to investigate the higher education provided by the Royal Veterinary College and to make judgements as to whether or not its academic standards and quality meet UK expectations. These expectations are the statements in the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) (the Quality Code)<sup>1</sup> setting out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and of each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

In Higher Education Review, the QAA review team:

- makes judgements on
  - the setting and maintenance of academic standards
  - the quality of student learning opportunities
  - the information provided about higher education provision
  - the enhancement of student learning opportunities
- provides a commentary on the selected theme
- makes recommendations
- identifies features of good practice
- affirms action that the provider is taking or plans to take.

A summary of the findings can be found in the section starting on page 2. [Explanations of the findings](#) are given in numbered paragraphs in the section starting on page 6.

In reviewing the Royal Veterinary College the review team has also considered a theme selected for particular focus across higher education in England and Northern Ireland.

The [themes](#) for the academic year 2014-15 are Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement and Student Employability,<sup>2</sup> and the provider is required to select, in consultation with student representatives, one of these themes to be explored through the review process.

The QAA website gives more information [about QAA](#) and its mission.<sup>3</sup> A dedicated section explains the method for [Higher Education Review](#)<sup>4</sup> and has links to the review handbook and other informative documents. For an explanation of terms see the [Glossary](#) at the end of this report.

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<sup>1</sup> The UK Quality Code for Higher Education is published at: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality/the-quality-code).

<sup>2</sup> Higher Education Review themes: [www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=106).

<sup>3</sup> QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/about-us).

<sup>4</sup> Higher Education Review web pages: [www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/reviews-and-reports/how-we-review-higher-education/higher-education-review)

## Key findings

### QAA's judgements about The Royal Veterinary College

The QAA review team formed the following judgements about the higher education provision at the Royal Veterinary College.

- The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.
- The enhancement of student learning opportunities is **commended**.

### Good practice

The QAA review team identified the following features of **good practice** at the Royal Veterinary College.

- The extensive use of external expertise across all aspects of the management of standards and quality (Expectations A3.4, B7, B11 and Enhancement).
- The integrated approach to student support provision, which enables a wide range of student needs to be met (Expectations B4, B3 and B11).
- The deliberate steps taken to build, sustain and enhance an environment which supports a high and effective level of engagement by all students in the management of learning opportunities (Expectations B5, B3, B4, B11 and Enhancement).
- The effective contribution the Lifelong Independent Veterinary Education Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning makes to the enhancement of student learning (Expectations Enhancement, B3 and B4).

### Recommendations

The QAA review team makes the following **recommendations** to The Royal Veterinary College.

By September 2015:

- ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before undertaking teaching and/or assessment (Expectations B3 and B11)
- clarify the monitoring, evaluation and institutional oversight of student equality and diversity (Expectation B4)
- ensure that all students have appropriate and timely access to information on procedures for complaints and appeals (Expectations B9, B10 and C).

### Affirmation of action being taken

The QAA review team **affirms** the following actions that The Royal Veterinary College is already taking to make academic standards secure and/or improve the educational provision offered to its students.

- The implementation of the new programme approval process (Expectations A3.1 and B1).
- The introduction of the new policy and guidance on feedback to taught students (Expectations B6 and B3).

- The introduction of an annual review of student performance data for postgraduate research degree programmes (Expectation B11).

## **Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement**

The Royal Veterinary College recognises a need to foster a culture of student engagement from entry through to graduation and beyond. Students are actively and proactively engaged in the quality assurance and enhancement of learning opportunities at all levels of the college. Overall, a view was formed that the College is taking deliberate steps to engage all students formally through its student representative systems on all committees and involvement in periodic review and validation. The College is further establishing measures to test the effectiveness of student engagement through the setting and monitoring of key performance indicators.

Further explanation of the key findings can be found in the handbook available on the QAA webpage explaining [Higher Education Review](#).

## About The Royal Veterinary College

The Royal Veterinary College (the College) is the largest veterinary school in the UK and the longest established in the English-speaking world and is a college of the University of London. The College offers taught provision at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and also offers continuing professional development programmes in veterinary medicine and veterinary nursing. In addition to taught provision, the College offers a programme of research degrees. The College carries out research of a national and international standing.

The College has two campuses, one in central London and one in Hertfordshire, and it also owns and manages the London BioScience Innovation Centre. It was founded as the London Veterinary College in 1791, heralding the start of the veterinary profession in Britain. The constitution and governance of the College are regulated by its Royal Veterinary College Charter and Royal Veterinary College Statutes, which were most recently revised and approved by the Privy Council in July 2010. The College is one of 19 self-governing colleges within the federation of the University of London. It was granted degree awarding powers for both taught and research degrees in 2010 but chooses not to exercise these and continues to award degrees of the University of London, except in the case of honorary awards.

The College mission is to provide inspirational leadership and excellence in veterinary science through innovative scholarship and pioneering clinical activity. It has the following strategic goals:

- to be leaders in the delivery of high quality programmes in veterinary education and associated subjects
- to provide student-focused environments delivering an educational, cultural and social experience that will underpin all College activities
- to deliver relevant, useful and economically sustainable research programmes of international significance to the animal health and comparative biomedical sector in the context of One Health
- to provide clinical care that is patient and client focused, and that is unrivalled in its commitment to quality and innovation
- to be the employer of first choice for those seeking to work in the veterinary, biosciences and One Health higher education sectors
- to have an impact on animal and human health through global reach and international partnerships.

A number of key changes have taken place since the last QAA review in 2009. These include continued development and diversification of the course portfolio, in both veterinary and related activity, and the restructuring of the Clinical Services Division. Significant changes have taken place in the College's senior management, in both responsibilities and personnel, including: a new Principal; the creation of the post of Chief Operating Officer; the refocusing of the Vice Principals' roles on the College's three key missions (Learning and the Student Experience, Research and Innovation, and Clinical Service); and the creation of three Associate Deanships, for Undergraduate Education, Taught Postgraduate Education, and the Student Experience. There has also been continued major development of the physical estate underpinning teaching and learning, including a new Teaching and Research Centre, Equine Referral Hospital and student village at Hawkshead, and the Lightwell Social Learning Space at Camden, London.

The College summarises the factors that challenge it as: the results in the National Student Survey, compared with other veterinary schools; enhancing the quality of the student experience while generating financial surpluses to support essential capital developments;

a number of buildings that are approaching the end of their useful life and therefore require replacement or comprehensive refurbishment; student social and sporting facilities that compare unfavourably to those in larger institutions; attracting both students and staff to the London area due to high living costs; and continuing difficulty in recruiting students from some under-represented groups, particularly ethnic minority communities.

The College has two courses for which the University of London is the awarding body, the MSc Livestock Health and Production and the MSc Veterinary Epidemiology and Public Health by distance learning. Both are provided by the College through the University of London International Academy. A number of the College's taught courses are delivered in collaboration with partners.

The College has responded fully and effectively to the recommendations made in the Institutional Audit report of February 2009.

## Explanation of the findings about The Royal Veterinary College

This section explains the review findings in more detail.

Terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers have been included in a [brief glossary](#) at the end of this report. A fuller [glossary of terms](#) is available on the QAA website, and formal definitions of certain terms may be found in the operational description and handbook for the [review method](#), also on the QAA website.

## 1 Judgement: The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards

**Expectation (A1):** In order to secure threshold academic standards, degree-awarding bodies:

**a) ensure that the requirements of *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* are met by:**

- positioning their qualifications at the appropriate level of the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- ensuring that programme learning outcomes align with the relevant qualification descriptor in the relevant framework for higher education qualifications
- naming qualifications in accordance with the titling conventions specified in the frameworks for higher education qualifications
- awarding qualifications to mark the achievement of positively defined programme learning outcomes

**b) consider and take account of QAA's guidance on qualification characteristics**

**c) where they award UK credit, assign credit values and design programmes that align with the specifications of the relevant national credit framework**

**d) consider and take account of relevant Subject Benchmark Statements.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A1: UK and European Reference Points for Academic Standards**

### Findings

1.1 Academic standards are defined through reference to both *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and the University of London generic requirements for degrees, and in the College's own regulatory framework. Course proposal teams are required to demonstrate that learning outcomes of any proposed new course align to the relevant qualification descriptors and set out how they meet relevant Subject Benchmark Statements. The College has regulations on how it awards credit, and credit accumulation.

1.2 The College has been authorised to award degrees and other awards of the University of London, since 1996, in accordance with its degree regulations and quality assurance procedures, to persons registered by the College as students.

1.3 The College's procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

1.4 The review team reviewed the operation and effectiveness of these procedures by looking at: the governing and general regulations; Subject Benchmark Statements; design, approval and review of course documentation; key committee meeting minutes; programme handbooks and programme specifications for 2014-15; external examiner reports; and by talking to senior and academic staff.



1.5 The evidence indicates that the policies and procedures used by the College are effective in practice. Qualifications are mapped to the appropriate level of the FHEQ through course design, validation and periodic review. Programme learning outcomes are aligned with relevant qualification descriptors in the FHEQ. Qualifications are named in accordance with the FHEQ and the University of London regulations. Programme specifications make reference to the FHEQ. External examiner reports confirm that the level of assessment on programmes is in line with the FHEQ.

1.6 Subject Benchmark Statements are considered as part of the validation and periodic review process, and discussion on updates to Subject Benchmark Statements takes place at the Course Management Committee. College staff have been actively involved nationally in the development of Subject Benchmark Statements, for example Veterinary Medicine and Veterinary Nursing.

1.7 The review team concludes that the College's policies and procedures, both in design and operation, meet the Expectation and that the associated risk level is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.1): In order to secure their academic standards, degree-awarding bodies establish transparent and comprehensive academic frameworks and regulations to govern how they award academic credit and qualifications.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.8 Academic governance of the College is the responsibility of the Academic Board, chaired by the Principal. The Academic Board delegates responsibility for the College's educational provision to five subcommittees.

1.9 The College has academic frameworks and regulations to govern how it awards academic credit and qualifications. Procedures for the design and approval of courses ensure that decisions on academic standards and quality of learning opportunities are taken separately from those which relate to business development, in order that academic standards are not compromised by business imperatives.

1.10 The College operates within generic University of London regulations and the College regulations are reviewed by either the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee or Research Degrees Committee, as appropriate, or by the Academic Registrar, with amendments approved by the relevant College committee and Academic Board.

1.11 The College's governance arrangements, academic frameworks and assessment regulations enable this Expectation to be met.

1.12 The review team evaluated the effectiveness of these structures, frameworks and regulations through a review of the terms of reference and minutes of the key College committees; College regulations; external members reports; and by talking to the Principal, senior and academic staff.

1.13 Structures are in place as set out in the Academic Committee Handbook 2014-15. Clear evidence was found of the development and monitoring of quality assurance of taught courses at the Teaching Quality Committee, and research degrees at the Research Degrees Committee. Course Management Committees take oversight of the respective undergraduate and postgraduate courses and report directly to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee for learning, teaching and assessment oversight. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee reports to and is accountable to the Academic Board. Membership of the committees includes staff and students, with external members on all but the Academic Board. Evidence demonstrates that in most cases externals attend and in some cases provide reports.

1.14 Programme development and the ongoing operation of programmes are informed by clear and comprehensive General Regulations for Study and Award; regulations governing Credit and Credit Accumulations; Assessment and Award Regulations; and Modularisation of MSc Programmes. Staff confirmed the use made of the regulations (see also Expectation A2.2).

1.15 A business plan for each proposal, approved in principle by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, assures the College that governance structures support academic standards and quality of learning opportunity. The plan is also submitted to the Senior Management Group to consider if the programme's resource requirements have been identified accurately and are made available for the respective manager.

1.16 The review team concludes that the College has effective structures in place to secure academic standards and carries out its responsibilities effectively through its academic committee structure. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A2.2): Degree-awarding bodies maintain a definitive record of each programme and qualification that they approve (and of subsequent changes to it) which constitutes the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programme, its monitoring and review, and for the provision of records of study to students and alumni.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A2: Degree-Awarding Bodies' Reference Points for Academic Standards**

**Findings**

1.17 The College maintains detailed, up-to-date programme specifications, and sets of Assessment and Award Regulations for each course or group of courses, including for each year of study. The programme specifications, and Assessment and Award Regulations, are considered by a Validation Panel in determining whether a course should be approved, as set out in the Current Procedures for Design and Approval of Courses. The relevant Course Development Committee is responsible for maintaining both programme specifications and Assessment and Award Regulations, with significant changes in either requiring approval from the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

1.18 In line with University of London regulations, a formal Memorandum of Agreement is in place where degrees are offered jointly with others; the Memorandum of Agreement is scrutinised by the Teaching Quality Committee, or, in the case of research degrees, by the Research Degrees Committee, and approved by the Academic Board (see also Expectation B10).

1.19 The College's approach to the maintenance of a definitive record for each programme and qualification, which constitute the reference point for delivery and assessment of the programmes, enable the Expectation to be met.

1.20 The review team tested the College's approach by examining the operational procedures; holding discussions with senior and academic staff; scrutinising Memoranda of Agreements; examining documentation from a range of validation events; periodic reviews; and minutes from key college committees.

1.21 The College maintains programme specifications as set out in the Procedures for Updating and Approving Programmes Specifications, and the Assessment and Award Regulations. In the case of the undergraduate courses there is a discrete set of regulations for each year. Staff confirmed that all of the courses have programme specifications and explained how the programme and year handbooks contain all of the information contained in the programme specifications.

1.22 Validation and periodic review documentation indicates discussion and careful consideration of programme specifications and ensures Assessment and Award Regulations are applicable for the award. Staff confirmed an annual process of scrutiny for Assessment and Award Regulations, and programme specifications, with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee approving any major changes.

1.23 The review team concludes that the College carries out its responsibilities effectively to ensure that its programme design processes rigorously take account of the definitive record of each programme and qualification. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.1): Degree-awarding bodies establish and consistently implement processes for the approval of taught programmes and research degrees that ensure that academic standards are set at a level which meets the UK threshold standard for the qualification and are in accordance with their own academic frameworks and regulations.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.24 The process for design and approval of programmes up to 2014 is clearly described in a procedure document. New undergraduate programmes (or modules) have to align themselves to the College's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. They also have to satisfy University of London regulations and a rationale for the programme has to be provided. A three-stage process then takes place: an overall approval; a business plan consideration; and, finally, a detailed consideration by a College Validation Panel. Postgraduate programmes go through a preliminary stage, receiving endorsement from a Master's Coordinating Committee before the first stage. Validation Panels consist of a Chair; and one other internal staff member, who are both members of the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee; and two external members representing other institutions or industry.

1.25 A new procedure has been introduced for all programmes, including specialist doctorates, which is to operate from 2015 onwards.

1.26 Staff are made aware of the requirements for course design, development and approval through the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Procedures. The procedures are designed to ensure that courses are delivered at the appropriate level of the FHEQ. The regulations, policies and procedures as set out enable the Expectation to be met.

1.27 The review team tested the effectiveness of the policies and procedures through meetings with staff and students. Documentation for both the previous and revised procedures was considered. The team read the minutes of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, Teaching Quality Committee, and Academic Board, and scrutinised the documentation relating to five validation events.

1.28 Validation and approval processes are carried out in accordance with the College's policies, procedures and guidance. There is clear evidence in the records of validation events that external advice is obtained, and that due consideration is given to ensuring that academic standards are appropriately set. Panels verify alignment with the FHEQ; Subject Benchmark Statements (where available); professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) requirements; and the Quality Code. Records show that panels meet members of the teaching team and students where applicable but meetings with students are not always formalised. Discussion appears to be thorough and wide ranging. Minutes of the Teaching Quality Committee clearly show that outcomes of validation events are given proper consideration before formal approval is granted. Academic staff are familiar with the processes, and understand the importance of validation and approval in assuring the standards of the courses.

1.29 The Teaching Quality Committee and Academic Board formally approved a new course design and approval process in December 2014 for implementation in 2015. The review team agreed with the College's own assessment that existing policies and procedures could be strengthened through the adoption of a more structured approach that

improves the timeliness and efficiency of the course design and approval process, and links proposals more closely to the College's strategic aims. The new process also provides for student membership of Validation Panels.

1.30 The new process is described in a revised design and approval of courses document. The new method of approval consists of a possible five stages. The first stage involves the Course Proposal and Development Group, and a separate approval stage for 'high risk' programmes by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and Academic Board. These stages were not included in the previous procedure. A first financial approval is then sought from the Senior Management Group; the proposal goes to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, or Research Degrees Committee, as appropriate, and is subsequently considered by the Academic Board, before consideration by a Validation Panel. Finally, the proposal receives a second financial approval, if required, by the Senior Management Group, or Course Proposal and Development Group, to consider the resource implications of the validation outcomes. The College expects the revised process to lead to fewer changes to courses following validation. The review team **affirms** the implementation of the new programme approval process (see also Expectation B1).

1.31 A process document is explicit in guiding Course Development Teams to the use of externality, Subject Benchmark Statements, the FHEQ, the Quality Code, and any PSRB requirements for a particular course. Validation Panel membership in the revised process includes the addition of a student member.

1.32 Overall, the review team concludes that the College has established processes for the approval of programmes, and that these have operated effectively in ensuring academic standards and are kept under review. The implementation of the new programme approval process enables weaknesses in the previous process, as identified by the College, to be addressed. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.2): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that credit and qualifications are awarded only where:**

- **the achievement of relevant learning outcomes (module learning outcomes in the case of credit and programme outcomes in the case of qualifications) has been demonstrated through assessment**
- **both UK threshold standards and their own academic standards have been satisfied.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.33 The Academic Board has overall responsibility for academic affairs, including the maintenance of standards and awards. The Academic Board delegates operational responsibility for the educational provision to its senior committees.

1.34 The principles on which assessment is based are set out in the College's Student Assessment Policy. General and course-specific Assessment and Award Regulations for taught courses, and assessment requirements for research degrees and specialist doctorates, are considered by the Teaching Quality Committee, Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, and Research Degrees Committee, and approved by the Academic Board.

1.35 The College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy sets out the framework for the various types of assessment methods used in its programmes. The programme design, validation, monitoring, examination and review process ensures that assessment methods are of a standard that matches the programme level, and that the assessment methods used relate to the specified learning outcomes. A criterion-referenced Common Grading Scheme is used for taught programmes to provide continuity across the College and to encourage the use of the full range of grades available; other marking schemes are used for specific assessment methods. The College's policies and procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

1.36 The review team reviewed documentation relating to the College's regulatory framework, policies and procedures with regard to assessment of learning outcomes and the award of credit; how assessment issues are considered in programme design, validation, monitoring and review; and how students are made aware of the assessment process and the criteria used for assessment. How policies and procedures work in practice was explored in meetings with staff and students.

1.37 The College's regulations, policies and procedures for assessment are clearly documented and readily available to students and staff. The relevant Assessment and Award Regulations are provided to each student in their Course Handbook, and are also available on the College's virtual learning environment (VLE), RVC Learn. All courses have programme specifications, including assessment methods and learning outcomes, and programme handbooks specify these for each learning and teaching session. Staff involved in assessment receive training and information, including an assessment in-service training day. Students receive information on assessment during the introductory week. Students on taught courses have a tutorial on the Common Grading Scheme. Formative assessments also help students understand the grading scheme.

1.38 The Assessment and Award Regulations for each programme are approved annually by the relevant Course Management Committee or Master's Coordinating Committee. College regulations are reviewed by Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, Research Degrees Committee, or by the Academic Registrar. Changes to regulations require approval by the Academic Board. A review of the College's assessment practices resulted in the development of a Common Grading Scheme and a set of 'design rules', with which all Assessment and Award Regulations must conform. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee is currently conducting a review of assessment loads across all programmes, and the College has an Assessment Project Action Plan with the intention of further enhancing the assessment process.

1.39 Student assessment is organised by the Examination Office within the Academic Registry. Boards of examiners are serviced professionally by staff from the Examination Office; there is close collaboration with the Chairs of Examination Boards. It was noted that specialised examination officers were particularly important to the management of the College's complex professional degrees. External examiners are appointed by the Academic Board and provide external oversight of standards. Boards of examiners, including external examiners, check and approve all examination results. Annual monitoring includes scrutiny of external examiners' reports, who are required to comment explicitly on the standard of students' work; where necessary, appropriate action is taken by staff, including the Course Director and the Chair of Examiners. External examiners are also required to moderate question papers. Feedback from alumni and employers is also used to inform the College of the appropriateness of the standards set for its courses, their content, learning outcomes and assessment.

1.40 The College has a framework and processes in place which adhere to the Expectation that assessments are appropriate and reliable, and that qualifications and credit are awarded on the basis of achievement of intended learning outcomes in accordance with internal and UK threshold academic standards. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and, because of the robust arrangements in place, including a structured approach to monitoring and review, the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (A3.3): Degree-awarding bodies ensure that processes for the monitoring and review of programmes are implemented which explicitly address whether the UK threshold academic standards are achieved and whether the academic standards required by the individual degree-awarding body are being maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.41 Annual monitoring of all programmes takes place, and periodic review occurs, every six years. The procedures for annual course monitoring and review are described in the Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Study document, and are also available in the Academic Quality Regulations and Procedures document.

1.42 The Annual Quality Improvement Report is normally prepared by the Course Director or Year Leader, and is approved by the Course Management Committee. The Teaching Quality Committee oversees the effectiveness of the monitoring process. It achieves this by appointing members of a Teaching Quality Committee subgroup to attend each Course Management Committee meeting where Annual Quality Improvement reports are discussed. The Teaching Quality Committee subgroup member then reports back on the effectiveness of the Course Management Committee scrutiny, any significant assurance and enhancement issues, and any College wide learning points.

1.43 The Academic Quality Manager produces two Annual Summary reports based on the Teaching Quality Committee subgroup reports, one for undergraduate courses and one for postgraduate courses, which are submitted to the full Teaching Quality Committee. Any action plans arising from Annual Quality Improvement Reports are submitted to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. During annual review, the academic standards of the programme are evaluated against benchmarks by reference to external examiner reports.

1.44 Periodic review is described in the Guidelines for Periodic Review of Courses document. The panel receives a self-evaluation document and will meet the course team as well as representative students, graduates and employers where considered appropriate. The review report, including an action plan, is then submitted in sequence to the Course Management Committee, Teaching Quality Committee, and, finally, Academic Board for approval.

1.45 The annual monitoring procedure and templates are weighted more towards consideration of the quality of learning opportunities rather than academic standards. For example, there is no dedicated section for response to external examiner comments on standards, if made but authors are prompted to consider external examiner comments when writing their reports. Periodic review templates are more specific about academic standards, and the periodic review panels expect documentation to reflect on the FHEQ and Subject Benchmark Statements. Boards of examiners also have a responsibility to ensure academic standards are met for all programmes each year.

1.46 In testing the College's policies and procedures the review team read documents including: the procedures for Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Study; the Guidelines for Periodic Review of Courses; Annual Quality Improvement Reports; and minutes of Course Management Committees, the Teaching Quality Committee and the Academic Board. The review team also held meetings with teaching staff, senior academic staff and students.

1.47 Annual Quality Improvement Reports are variable in the detail included. The template for the report does not have a section related to external examiner reports and therefore not all make reference to external examiner comments on standards. However, external examiner comments are responded to in other sections of most reports, especially within the specific section on assessment. The institutional use of external examiner reports is described and evaluated in section B7 of this report, but, at a programme level, the College's consideration of external examiner reports could be more consistent.

1.48 The periodic review process is more specific in asking the programme team to comment on academic standards, and examples of periodic reviews seen by the review team addressed academic standards specifically. Academic staff met by the review team were familiar with the processes, and understood the significance of monitoring and review for the purposes of standards assurance.

1.49 Overall, the review team concludes that the College's approach to monitoring and review of standards is effective. There are some minor issues of inconsistency in implementation but the review team is assured that the standards are being considered appropriately through monitoring and review processes. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (A3.4): In order to be transparent and publicly accountable, degree-awarding bodies use external and independent expertise at key stages of setting and maintaining academic standards to advise on whether:**

- **UK threshold academic standards are set, delivered and achieved**
- **the academic standards of the degree-awarding body are appropriately set and maintained.**

**Quality Code, Chapter A3: Securing Academic Standards and an Outcomes-Based Approach to Academic Awards**

**Findings**

1.50 The College uses external specialist advisers in the design, validation and periodic review of its programmes. External examiners provide independent advice on whether academic standards are set appropriately and maintained for each programme, and whether students are achieving the necessary standards. A particular feature of the College is external membership in all subcommittees of the Academic Board and in undergraduate and postgraduate Course Management Committees. The College also seeks feedback from alumni and employers on the continued appropriateness of the academic standards of its programmes (see also Expectation A3.2). The various mechanisms used to obtain independent expert guidance on the setting and maintenance of academic standards enables the Expectation to be met.

1.51 The review team reviewed documentation on the College's use of external and independent expertise in quality assurance processes, including: course design and validation; external examiners reports; annual monitoring and action plans; periodic reviews; the Academic Committee Handbook; and the role of external members. How externality is used in practice to support the management of threshold academic standards was discussed in meetings with staff and students.

1.52 The extent of external input to course design and development at the College is proportionate to the nature of the proposal: a completely new course using a wider range of external advice compared with a course modification. External members of Validation Panels are proposed by the member of staff leading the course proposal; nominees should normally include senior academics running similar programmes, senior members of relevant professions, and representatives of employers. The Chair of the Validation Panel approves external members. The evidence demonstrates extensive and effective use of external expertise (see Expectation B1 for further information on course design, development and approval).

1.53 The College makes good use of its external examiners, who play a key role in determining whether standards are appropriate and have been achieved by students. The response to an external examiner's report and any action plans arising from their comments are approved by Teaching Quality Committee, and forwarded to the Academic Board and external examiner and to the Course Management Committee for information. Comments raised by external examiners are discussed at the relevant Course Management Committee. External Examiner Reports are published on the College website (see Expectation B7 for further information).

1.54 Course annual monitoring and periodic review were found to pay particular attention to the maintenance of academic standards. Annual monitoring reports include the production, where necessary, of action plans. Periodic review panels include at least two external members, one of whom should normally be an academic and one from the relevant

industry or profession. External members of review panels are nominated by the course management team and are subject to scrutiny by the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Teaching Quality Committee and the Academic Quality Manager prior to approval. External members should not have served as an external examiner for the course under review in the previous six years (see also Expectations A3.2 and B8).

1.55 External members of Academic Board subcommittees, and undergraduate and postgraduate Course Management Committees, are usually nominated by the Committee and provide a valuable external perspective on the College's activities, including an annual report. External members of Course Management Committees, where module reviews are considered, have knowledge of industry relevant to the Committee's remit; external members of the Research Degrees Committee reflect the range and type of research degrees offered. External members of other committees can advise on whether the College's quality assurance processes are comparable with other UK higher education institutions, or, in the case of the Student Development Committee, have expertise in evaluating service departments. External members are appointed for four years, with the option to reappoint. The extensive use of external expertise across all aspects of the management of standards and quality is **good practice** (see also Expectations B7 and B11, and Enhancement).

1.56 The College's policies and procedures enable independent and external participation in the setting and maintenance of academic standards, and provide assurance that both the University of London's academic standards and UK threshold standards are set, delivered and achieved. The extensive use of external expertise is identified as good practice. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards: Summary of findings

1.57 In reaching its positive judgement the review team matched its findings against the criteria in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All of the Expectations in this judgement area are met and the associated risks are considered to be low. There are no recommendations. Expectation A3.1 contains one affirmation regarding the College's implementation of its new programme approval process, which is cross-referenced to Expectation B1. There is one feature of good practice in Expectation A3.4: the extensive use of external expertise across all aspects of the management of standards and quality, which is linked to Expectations B7 and B11, and to Enhancement.

1.58 The setting and maintenance of the academic standards of awards offered at the College **meets** UK expectations.

## 2 Judgement: The quality of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (B1): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective processes for the design, development and approval of programmes**

### **Quality Code, Chapter B1: Programme Design, Development and Approval**

#### **Findings**

2.1 The process for design and approval of programmes up to 2014 was clearly described in a procedure document. New undergraduate programmes (or modules) had to align themselves to the College's Mission Statement and Strategic Plan. They also had to satisfy University of London regulations and a rationale for the programme had to be provided. A three-stage process then took place: an overall approval, a business plan consideration, and, finally, a detailed consideration by the College Validation Panel. Postgraduate programmes went through a preliminary stage, receiving endorsement from the Master's Coordinating Committee before the first stage.

2.2 The Validation Panel consisted of a Chair, two internal members who were also members of the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, and two external members representing other institutions or industry.

2.3 A different procedure has been introduced for all programmes, including specialist doctorates, from 2015 onwards. The new process is described in paragraphs 1.29 to 1.31.

2.4 The previous process allowed Validation Panels, and academic committees before them, to evaluate the student learning experience by asking specific questions about teaching and learning methods, resources, assessment practices, and how they align with the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy. Validation Panels are explicitly directed to consider the appropriateness of the assessment and feedback regime. The new process allows for the same evaluation through additional stages. The process also makes provision for student membership of Validation Panels. However, the new process is yet to be evaluated in operation. The regulations, policies and procedures both previous and new enable the Expectation to be met.

2.5 In testing the College's procedures, documents setting out both the previous and new procedures were considered by the review team. In addition, the review team read the minutes of the Academic Board, Teaching Quality Committee, and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. Five sets of documentation associated with validations were provided for the review team to consider. The team met staff and students to discuss how the procedures operate in practice.

2.6 There was clear evidence in validation reports that Validation Panels, which include external membership, discussed: learning and teaching methods, resources needed, assessment, student numbers, student support and course identity. Documents supplied to illustrate the periodic review process made clear that rigorous use of course Annual Quality Improvement Reports was made to inform the periodic review panel's decision and action plan.

2.7 Programme specifications produced from the process make clear reference to Subject Benchmark Statements and the FHEQ, and also map assessments to learning

outcomes. They give details of the teaching and learning methods employed, as well as programme structure and details of any placement or work-based learning requirements.

2.8 The College's processes for the design, development and approval of programmes are clearly guided by process documentation. Staff are fully conversant with the procedures, and records of validations demonstrate rigorous consideration of academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities. The review team affirms the implementation of the new approval process as set out in the linked Expectation A3.1. The review team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B2): Recruitment, selection and admission policies and procedures adhere to the principles of fair admission. They are transparent, reliable, valid, inclusive and underpinned by appropriate organisational structures and processes. They support higher education providers in the selection of students who are able to complete their programme.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B2: Recruitment, Selection and Admission to Higher Education**

**Findings**

2.9 The College has an admissions policy that sets out its processes and objectives for recruitment and selection. The policy has been approved by the Academic Board and is published on the College's website. The College also has a specific set of procedures for accreditation of prior learning, which are also published online.

2.10 To ensure more consistent application of admissions policy, the College has recently brought admissions criteria and processes under the responsibility of the Taught Programmes Admissions Committee, a subcommittee of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, rather than relying upon individual Course Management committees. The Research Degrees Committee has responsibility for oversight of postgraduate research student admissions. A new College access team was formed in 2013 to achieve a consistent approach to recruitment and admissions, as well as widening participation.

2.11 The College's procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

2.12 The review team tested the College's policy and procedures through the scrutiny of existing procedures, records of policies in practice, communications with prospective students, and minutes of relevant committees such as the Taught Programmes Admissions Committee. The review team also discussed the process of application and induction with students and College staff.

2.13 The policy and procedures of the College are clearly informed by its overall direction; the College has arrangements in place to enable strategic decision making regarding student numbers, and ensures that admission policy and practice is coordinated with service provision. The review team considered that where changes to courses had been made following admission these were effectively communicated to those affected.

2.14 The review team discussed the process of application and induction with students, who expressed positive experiences. The College provides an online induction course enabling students to access key information, introduce themselves to course themes and to familiarise themselves with the VLE before beginning their formal study.

2.15 Some research students receive a two-day induction, with presentations from various College services and personnel. However, the review team's discussions with students showed that this was not the case for all research students and some had briefer inductions upon commencing their programme.

2.16 The review team also heard evidence from students and staff regarding the steps taken to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students. While the College clearly makes provision for disabled students wherever possible, the College could more clearly articulate requisite competency standards for programmes other than the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine, to ensure that potentially affected applicants are informed at the earliest opportunity.



2.17 Overall, the review team regards the College's policy and procedures as consistent with the Expectation. Policy is clearly set out and published online, and is followed by relevant bodies. Students are well informed regarding the process of admission and have access to information to transition from applicant to student. The review team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B3): Higher education providers, working with their staff, students and other stakeholders, articulate and systematically review and enhance the provision of learning opportunities and teaching practices, so that every student is enabled to develop as an independent learner, study their chosen subject(s) in depth and enhance their capacity for analytical, critical and creative thinking.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B3: Learning and Teaching***

#### **Findings**

2.18 The objectives of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy (2014-19) include: maximising the quality of learning; promoting independent learning; ensuring all graduates have skills that improve their employability; and to continue developing the learning environment, including the use of technology-enhanced learning. The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy implementation plan, which is shared by the Course Management Committees, will be monitored annually by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. The course validation and annual monitoring processes ensure that course delivery and the provision of the learning resources enable the attainment of learning outcomes (see also Expectation A3.2). Data from various sources, including student, graduate and employer surveys, external examiner reports, and Annual Quality Improvement Reports, are used to enhance learning and teaching. The Royal Veterinary College Charter (2013-14) articulates the College's values and Code of Practice for both staff and students. The College's policies and procedures enable the Expectation to be met.

2.19 To determine whether the Expectation is met, the review team held meetings with staff and students, examined relevant documentation, including strategies, action plans, committee minutes, policies and procedures, and looked at online learning resources.

2.20 In meetings with academic and professional staff, and with students, it was evident that there is widespread support for the development of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy, and of staff and students working in partnership to further develop and enhance the learning environment (see also section 4 on Enhancement).

2.21 Data from a variety of sources are used by the College to enhance learning and teaching, including: student, graduate and employer surveys; external examiner reports; annual monitoring; external experts at in-service training days; Annual Quality Improvement Reports; and course reviews. Further contribution is made through student representatives on committees, particularly Course Management Committees and working groups. The Student Survey Strategy Working Group, a subgroup of the Teaching Quality Committee, oversees the administration of student surveys. The Student Survey Results Working Group of the Teaching Quality Committee was formed in September 2014; chaired by the Principal, the purpose of the group is to consider results of College-wide student surveys, identify any course wide issues and required actions, and to discuss actions with Course Directors and other relevant staff.

2.22 The development of learning and teaching is supported by the College's Information Strategy (2013-17), e-Learning Strategy (2010-15) and Estate's Strategy (2009-18). The College has a wide variety of physical and online learning environments, including the Clinical Skills Centre, Learning Resources Centres, the Teaching and Research Centre, the College VLE (RVC Learn), MyRVC, and the open educational resource, WikiVet. The Library and Information Services Division and the e-Media Unit monitor the majority of these learning environments.

2.23 All sections of the College with responsibilities for the learning environment report annually to the Academic Board, which, together with the Senior Management Group, determines whether objectives are being achieved. The student written submission for the review refers to an excellent array of resources for undergraduate and postgraduate students, a view supported by students at meetings during the review visit. A Student Development Committee, which reports to the Academic Board, was formed in 2013-14 to provide a more holistic view of student development, and is responsible for tutoring and the provision of professional student support services. The Student Development Committee receives reports from the College's Services Forum, which is a useful route for student representatives to discuss issues relating to the learning environment and to the estate in general. The Services Forum also produces an annual report for the Senior Management Group.

2.24 The College has in place effective structures and processes to support the development of staff involved in learning and teaching. Mentoring and peer observation is provided for new academic staff. Staff development needs are formally considered during academic probation, and through annual appraisal. Understanding of the College's educational philosophy is promoted through staff attendance at the Postgraduate Certificate in Veterinary Education and by staff development events, including the annual in-service training days on Learning and Teaching and on Assessment. The Teaching Quality Committee receives a report on attendance at staff development events; the impact of staff development is evaluated at annual appraisal. Human resources are responsible for managing the Staff Training and Development Programme. The Advice Centre supports Human resources in running a programme each year on supporting students in distress. Higher Education Academy membership is encouraged through either a qualification route (Postgraduate Certificate) or a practice and reflection route for more experienced staff; 51 per cent of College academic staff are Higher Education Academy Fellows, more than twice the sector average. The Lifelong Independent Veterinary Education Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (LIVE CETL) is an important vehicle through which developments in learning and teaching are promoted, with representation on various committees including the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (see also section 4 on Enhancement). Training is provided for support services staff. Training for research students who teach is available and is taken by most students (see also Expectation B11), although this is not compulsory prior to teaching. The review team **recommends** that the College ensure all research students receive appropriate training before undertaking teaching and/or assessment.

2.25 There are links from the College's support of learning and teaching to two features of good practice: the integrated approach to student support which enables a wide range of student needs to be met (Expectation B4); and the deliberate steps taken to build, sustain and enhance an environment which supports a high and effective level of engagement by all students in the management of learning opportunities (Expectation B5).

2.26 The College has effective processes for reviewing and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, including systems to receive and act upon feedback from a variety of sources, review the learning environment, and provide support for staff development. There is a recommendation to ensure that all postgraduate research students receive appropriate training before undertaking teaching and/or assessment, but this does not substantially affect the associated systems for assuring the quality of student learning opportunities. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B4): Higher education providers have in place, monitor and evaluate arrangements and resources which enable students to develop their academic, personal and professional potential.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B4: Enabling Student Development and Achievement**

**Findings**

2.27 The College's approach to enabling student development and achievement is described in the Strategic Plan (2014-19) and in detail in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy and The Royal Veterinary College Charter. The College's Single Equality Scheme aims to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to fulfil their potential. Implementation of the Strategic Plan and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy will be monitored and reviewed annually by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee and Senior Management Group. From 2015, the Student Development Committee will oversee reviews of the tutorial system and professional student support services, and report to the Teaching Quality Committee. The College has induction and transition events for its students, and provides advice and support for students to help them to develop to their full potential. The College's strategic approaches, procedures and student advice, and support services enable the Expectation to be met.

2.28 To determine whether the Expectation is met, the review team held meetings with staff and students, examined relevant documentation, including strategies, action plans, committee minutes, policies and procedures, and viewed online resources supporting student development and achievement.

2.29 Meetings with students and staff supported the aims of the College's Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy to further develop the learning environment and ensure that all graduates have skills that improve their employability. Students spoke highly of the support available for their studies and their well-being.

2.30 The College has comprehensive induction and transition arrangements. During induction, students are introduced to the services available to support them academically and non-academically. Pre-session courses are obligatory for international students and it is the College's intention to also offer pre-session course to all master's students. The Learning Development Team sends emails to Gateway and international students prior to their arrival at the College regarding learning support opportunities, and also talks to all students during the induction period. Support is provided for students lacking IT skills. All students complete timetabled Health and Safety inductions before undertaking work in college laboratories. Students are provided with their Course Handbook materials on RVC Learn, and Course Directors and Year Leaders address students at the beginning of each academic year to provide them with information on their studies, including feedback policy, assessment methods and plagiarism policy.

2.31 The Advice Centre runs roadshows at each campus to promote its services. Transition events are held between the Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine gateway year and year 1, between year 2 and year 3, and between year 4 and intra-mural rotations. Transition events are also run on Day One Skills before Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine graduates enter veterinary practice. Careers events are also run to help the transition into employment. Employability skills are embedded in all courses, with work-based learning opportunities for all undergraduates.

2.32 A flexible approach is adopted for academic tutoring, which varies between courses and years depending upon students' needs and whether they are based on a College

campus or are distance learners. Tutors provide feedback on students' work and support self-reflection by students on their work. The College's new policy and guidance on feedback for taught students (2014) is the subject of an affirmation under Expectation B6. A tutor team lead by a senior tutor, and including a dedicated international tutor, is available on each campus for students with academic or pastoral issues. Cross-campus meetings are held between tutorial teams at least once a term to aid communication and discuss enhancements to tutor system. Close liaison is also maintained between tutors and staff in the Advice Centre and in the Learning Development Team. The College is the first point of contact for tutorial support for students on joint programmes. Support is provided for students before, during and after placements. Some concerns were expressed in the student written submission about whether the tutorial system provides sufficient pastoral support for some students but this was not a view found in meetings with students and support staff. There are Academic Progress Review committees for undergraduate and postgraduate students at each campus, which deal with student progression issues that are beyond the normal tutor-based monitoring, and advisory processes for taught courses and supervisory roles for research students, and Clinical Training Scholarship programme students. Academic Progress Review Committees review and arrange support for students whose academic progress is at risk; students can self-refer to an Academic Progress Review Committee.

2.33 The College provides both in-house and outsourced support services, which are coordinated by the Advice Centre Manager. Information on support available is accessible on the Advice Centre website, and on RVC Learn and social media. There is an in-house Money and Welfare Adviser, Disability Adviser and Chaplain, and the Learning Development Team provides study skills sessions for students, including those referred by an Academic Progress Review Committee. Outsourced support services include: the University of Hertfordshire's Counselling Service, which provides onsite counselling at both College campuses; the University of London's Careers Service for individual students by referral; Dyslexia tutors, who provide onsite support on each campus; an Occupational Health Service; and a Housing Service. Students spoke very positively about the support available to them.

2.34 Establishment of the Student Development Committee has enabled the College to take a more holistic view of student development and associated support services, with the aim of ensuring consistency of support across the College's provision. The external member of the Student Development Committee helps to benchmark the College's student development provision against other higher education institutions. Memoranda of Agreements with partner institutions specify the responsibilities for student development and achievement. The integrated approach to student support provision, which enables a wide range of student needs to be met, is **good practice**. Students are actively involved in the development of student support as members of the Student Development Committee, the College Services Forum and as student technologists in the e-Media Unit (see good practice in Expectation B5).

2.35 Management information provided by the Registry is considered annually by the Teaching Quality Committee. The Learning Resources Centre on each campus, which combine library and IT facilities, constantly monitor usage and demand, and make adjustments as necessary. The Student Barometer Survey can provide the College with a baseline on how its induction arrangements, including pre-sessional courses, are regarded by students. Student and staff surveys inform planning and development decisions by the Senior Management Group regarding IT and library provision.

2.36 Equality and diversity for staff and students is overseen by the Equality Strategy Group, which is monitored and managed by human resources. During the visit, it was stated that the Equality Strategy Group was separate from the committee system, and the intention

is that Equality Strategy Group will report in future to the Senior Management Group. Student representatives on the Equality Strategy Group were reported to consider that there were few issues of relevance to students that were considered by the Equality Strategy Group. The College's monitoring and evaluation of data for students with protected characteristics is hampered by its small size, with the numbers of students in some groups being too small to be statistically meaningful. In 2013-14 the College combined data outputs to identify areas in need of investigation, which led to work on perceived differential progression rates related to domicile and disability. All groups were monitored in the same way and where differences were found the Teaching Quality Committee oversaw actions taken. The College's next annual exercise will also be informed by Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) research on differential rates of success of different equality groups, and a case study approach may be adopted given the small number of students. The review team **recommends** that the College clarify the monitoring, evaluation and institutional oversight of student equality and diversity.

2.37 Overall the College has robust and effective systems in place to support students in their academic, personal and professional development. The integrated approach to student support, which enables a wide range of student needs to be met is considered to be a feature of good practice. There are links from the College's support of student development and achievement to a second feature of good practice: the deliberate steps taken to build, sustain and enhance an environment which supports a high and effective level of engagement by all students in the management of learning opportunities (Expectation B5). There is a recommendation to clarify the monitoring, evaluation and institutional oversight of student equality and diversity, but this does not substantially affect the robustness of the associated processes for student development and achievement. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B5): Higher education providers take deliberate steps to engage all students, individually and collectively, as partners in the assurance and enhancement of their educational experience.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B5: Student Engagement**

**Findings**

2.38 Student engagement is incorporated into the College's Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy, for which amplified student engagement is one of the three key objectives. The strategy sets out clear goals for engagement, with accompanying key performance indicators (KPIs). Students are represented on all major College committees. Course Management committees engage with student feedback through course representatives and by consideration of module or strand evaluations surveys. Overall responsibility for student engagement rests with the Associate Dean for Student Experience.

2.39 A Student Feedback Annual Summary Report is produced each year and is used for curriculum enhancement and staff development. The College also operates a Student Survey Results Working Group to coordinate responses to issues emerging from student surveys. The College is in the process of including students on Validation Panels and periodic review panels (see paragraph 1.29).

2.40 The College's policy and supporting arrangements regarding student engagement enables the Expectation to be met.

2.41 The review team met undergraduate and postgraduate students, including distance learners, as well as with College staff responsible for student engagement. In addition, the review team considered policies and structures, committee minutes and resources, and information produced for student representatives and for students in general.

2.42 Training for students is regular and well supported, including initial induction, leadership training, and handover guidance. This is supported by termly awards/certificates recognising students who have made strong contributions to quality assurance at the College. There is a clear system for capturing and passing on representatives' experience by use of handover forms. Training is monitored by gathering feedback from students during the year. The College and Students' Union collaborate to produce a handbook, which sets out the expectations of a representative. The review team spoke to students who were complementary about the training and support available to them as representatives.

2.43 The College operates a 'You Said, We Did' approach to communicating the impact of student representation. Responses have included changes to assessment, facilities, and the appointment of a new lecturer to enable increased course content in a particular area, following student feedback. A 'You Say, We Pay' system operates for the Library.

2.44 The election of student representatives is organised by the Students' Union. There are usually two representatives per course per year. Representatives are elected in October each year and remain in post until December of the following year to ensure sufficient overlap to enable an effective handover. The College has recently agreed to fund a full-time General Manager for the Students' Union to enable student officers to focus on representation rather than administrative functions.

2.45 The College seeks to ensure that the voice of all students is heard, including part-time students and postgraduates, and ensures that students' are supported to make effective contributions to the College's quality assurance and enhancement processes. The College is also working in partnership with students in the enhancement of teaching and learning through the e-Media Unit and the Technology Club. The review team

considered that the College's deliberate steps taken to build, sustain and enhance an environment that supports a high and effective level of engagement by all students in the management of learning opportunities is **good practice**.

2.46 The College has an established and well supported system for student engagement, and clearly values the contributions to quality assurance and enhancement made by its students. There is good practice associated with this Expectation, which also links to section 4, the enhancement of student learning opportunities. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (B6): Higher education providers operate equitable, valid and reliable processes of assessment, including for the recognition of prior learning, which enable every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes for the credit or qualification being sought.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B6: Assessment of Students and the Recognition of Prior Learning**

**Findings**

2.47 The College's framework for managing assessment of students is contained in a series of documents that includes the overarching Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy (2014-19), a Student Assessment Policy, General Assessment Regulations, and a procedure for updating and approving Assessment & Award Regulations. All are published on the College website within the Academic Quality, Regulations and Procedures section; this includes details of the evaluation of Approved Prior Learning claims made by students.

2.48 The process of assessment is organised by the Examinations Office, part of the Registry. Documentation is made available to students and staff through RVC Learn, the College's VLE and the quality procedures on the website. Students have access to the relevant course Assessment and Award Regulations in their Course Handbooks.

2.49 Formative as well as summative assessment is used, and a new feedback policy and guidance has been introduced. The membership and conduct of Examination Boards are clearly described in the Academic Quality, Regulations and Procedures online, and their decisions are recorded and sent to students in a timely manner. Assessment practice is reviewed annually by the Teaching Quality Committee through the external examiner summary reports and the Annual Quality Improvement Reports, which contain specific sections in the action plans for assessment of students.

2.50 There is a documented policy on academic misconduct procedures and all students have academic misconduct explained to them during their induction to their course; sessions on ethical research are held before they begin their enquiry. Plagiarism-detection software is used for coursework submission where appropriate.

2.51 Staff are encouraged to attend the annual in-service training day on assessment, and before they can be an internal examiner they must have spent a year as an assistant internal examiner. External examiners are also encouraged to attend. The College has used its involvement in its LIVE CETL to put together a definitive guide to veterinary assessment practices.

2.52 The evaluation of assessment practice, including aspects of feedback to students on their work occurs through the provision of module feedback and through student membership of course committees.

2.53 The design of the processes and the nature of the documentation enables the achievement of equitable, valid and reliable conduct of assessment, and in particular enables every student to demonstrate the extent to which they have achieved the intended learning outcomes of their programme of study. This therefore enables the Expectation to be met.

2.54 The review team tested the policies and procedures relating to student assessment by scrutinising documentation including the Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Enhancement Strategy, the Student Assessment Policy and external examiner reports. The review team also met students and staff to discuss the operation of assessment practice.

2.55 The Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy has as one of its objectives 'to further develop assessment strategies that demonstrably reward the achievement of the desired learning outcomes, are valid and reliable, and that promote learning'. The Student Assessment Policy mirrors the objectives in the overarching strategy and is specific about three areas: the effective use of formative and summative assessment, the use of feedback to improve student achievement, and the design of assessment to determine if students have reached the required standards.

2.56 Staff development opportunities exist to support staff in assessing students. The in-service training days specifically cover assessment related topics including how to give effective feedback, managing online assessments, and Improving Assessments - the Art of the Possible.

2.57 The student submission reports some student dissatisfaction with feedback on coursework, but this was not supported by evidence from students during the meetings held with the review team. The College has put in place a new feedback policy and supporting guidance. Academic staff and students reported that feedback had improved over the last year in response to previous National Student Survey results. However, the new feedback policy aims to further improve the quality and timeliness of feedback and develop more consistency of practice. The review team **affirms** the College's introduction of the new policy and guidance on feedback to taught students.

2.58 A subgroup of the Teaching Quality Committee, the external examiner report subgroup, considers all external examiner reports and approves the responses made to them. The subgroup then forwards these to the Academic Board. This allows the College to take an overview of assessment issues and the responses made to them. The Academic Board receives an annual report that draws together cross-institutional issues. The College has processes in place to periodically review the scope and amount of assessment in order to evaluate its effectiveness. The review team was informed that the College is currently undertaking a major review of assessment, which will cover, among other things, assessment load, weighting, appropriateness, and timing.

2.59 The policies, procedures and processes for managing assessment of students are, in both design and operation, effective in ensuring that assessment is equitable, valid and reliable. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B7): Higher education providers make scrupulous use of external examiners.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B7: External Examining**

**Findings**

2.60 University of London regulations provide the College with the authority to appoint external examiners. The College's external examining system was reviewed by a Teaching Quality Committee working group in 2013, and the criteria for the appointment of external examiners and teams of external examiners were updated. That review concluded that Expectation B7 of the Quality Code was met. The College normally requires the involvement of at least two external examiners for each Examination Board. The College's external examiners play a key role in the assurance of standards (see Expectation A3.4) and of quality; their duties include ensuring assessment schemes match course objectives; approval of written examination papers; confirming standards of marking are satisfactory; observing clinical examinations; ensuring conduct of examinations is compliant with the regulations; and attending and approving decisions of the exam board. College procedures relating to reports submitted by external examiners are documented in the Academic Quality Assurance and Enhancement Procedures, and are available via the College intranet and website.

2.61 External examiners for taught programmes are nominated by Course Directors who submit their nominations to the Academic Quality Officer (Standards). Scrutiny of nominations, which must be accompanied by a recent CV, is by the Teaching Quality Committee, subject to approval by the Academic Board. For collaborative provision, external examiners are appointed in accordance with the Memorandum of Agreement. External examiner appointments for research degrees are approved by the Research Degrees Committee and the Academic Board. The College looks widely when recruiting suitably qualified external examiners for its taught courses, including those from medical schools. Where external examiners are appointed from outside higher education they join a team of experienced academic external examiners.

2.62 On appointment, external examiners are provided with detailed briefing materials on their roles and the courses to be examined. Newly appointed external examiners are expected to attend the annual in-service training day on assessment, which includes induction sessions for external and internal examiners. The relevant Course Director also briefs external examiners on their duties.

2.63 External examiners complete their annual reports using the College's external examiners' report form, which contains questions in specified areas, including Programme, Student Performance, Assessment Process, and Procedures. In particular, external examiners are asked to identify any areas of good practice and provide any suggestions for improvement. External examiners are free to provide additional comments.

2.64 Responses to external examiners' reports and the action plans produced are approved by the Teaching Quality Committee, and sent to the Academic Board and the external examiner. The comments raised by external examiners are discussed at the relevant Course Management Committee and are analysed as part of the annual monitoring process. The Academic Quality Officer (Standards) produces an Annual Summary of all external examiner reports for the Teaching Quality Committee, which highlights College-wide themes, issues and good practice, and an action plan for enhancement.

2.65 The College's procedures were found to be clear and comprehensive, allowing scrupulous use of external examiners. The Expectation is therefore met.

2.66 To determine whether Expectation B7 is met, the review team examined relevant documentation on external examiners' reports and how they are considered and acted upon. In meetings with staff the external examiner process and the College's engagement with external examiners was discussed. Students were asked about their access to external examiner reports and where they were discussed.

2.67 The meetings with staff, and the documentation provided, showed that external examiner reports are considered in a systematic and thorough manner by the College, including at the Course Management committees and the Teaching Quality Committee.

2.68 The College is trialling opportunities for external examiners to meet students. A meeting between MSc students and external examiners in October 2014 was considered to be very useful by both groups. External examiner reports are posted on the College's intranet, where they are accessible to staff and students. Students who met the review team were aware that they are available and that they are discussed at Course Management Committees and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, all of which have student representation (see Expectation B5).

2.69 The procedures for external examining are clear and well managed, and there is an effective system for analysing, considering and acting upon external examiner reports through the annual monitoring process and the role of the Teaching Quality Committee and its subgroup, which has student representation. There are links from the College's use of external examiners to a feature of good practice: the extensive use of external expertise across all aspects of the management of standards and quality (Expectation A3.4). The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B8): Higher education providers, in discharging their responsibilities for setting and maintaining academic standards and assuring and enhancing the quality of learning opportunities, operate effective, regular and systematic processes for monitoring and for review of programmes.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B8: Programme Monitoring and Review***

**Findings**

2.70 All programmes undergo annual monitoring, and periodic review occurs every six years. The procedures for annual course monitoring and review are described in the Monitoring and Review of Programmes of Study document, and are also available in the Academic Quality Regulations and Procedures published online.

2.71 The Course Director or Year Leader prepares an Annual Quality Improvement Report. It is then considered and approved by the Course Management Committee for each programme and then submitted to the Academic Quality Manager. A member of the Teaching Quality Committee sits on each Course Management Committee where the Annual Quality Improvement Report is considered, and these members form the Teaching Quality Committee subgroups. The Academic Quality Manager produces two Annual Summary reports based on the Teaching Quality Committee subgroup reports, one for undergraduate courses and one for postgraduate courses, which are submitted to the full Teaching Quality Committee. Any action plans arising from Annual Quality Improvement Reports are submitted to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee.

2.72 During annual review the academic standards of the programme are evaluated against benchmarks by reference to external examiner reports. The Annual Quality Improvement Reports contain sections on teaching and learning, resources, student achievement, student support, student feedback and recruitment. The annual monitoring procedure focuses clearly on the Expectation of the Quality Code, *Chapter B8*. The templates for the Annual Quality Improvement Report concentrate specifically on the quality of learning opportunities.

2.73 Periodic review is described in the Guidelines for Periodic Review of Courses document. Review panels consist of two internal members, two external members, a student and a secretary. The panel receives a self-evaluation document, and will meet the course team as well as representative students, graduates and employers where considered appropriate. The review report, including an action plan, is then submitted to the Course Management Committee and the Teaching Quality Committee, followed by the Academic Board. Periodic review templates are also specific about the quality of the learning opportunities. Validation Panels expect periodic review documentation to reflect on these areas, as well as being guided to ask staff and students about their experiences, with a view to improvement.

2.74 An interim review after three years allows for changes to be made to the course before a revalidation event becomes necessary, facilitating a more timely response to feedback from stakeholders.

2.75 In testing the effectiveness of the procedures for monitoring and review, the review team examined the relevant policy and procedure documents and scrutinised sample Annual Quality Improvement Reports. Meetings with staff and students enabled the review team to assess the processes in action.

2.76 There is variability in the detail that Annual Quality Improvement Reports contain. However, the reports clearly demonstrate that an evaluative analysis of issues arising takes place. The reports also identify good practice for dissemination.

2.77 Periodic review documentation indicates that the process reviews and evaluates all aspects of a programme based on the six previous years' annual monitoring. Students are met during the periodic review process and those unable to meet review panels can make written contributions.

2.78 Academic staff met by the review team were familiar with the processes and understood the significance of monitoring and review for the purposes of standards assurance and quality enhancement.

2.79 The College reviews its processes and practices on a regular basis to make them more effective. The Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy (2013-18) incorporates the intention to review processes regularly to ensure they remain fit for purpose.

2.80 The review team concludes that the College's operation of its procedures for annual monitoring and periodic review, and its support for staff undertaking these processes, is effective. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B9): Higher education providers have procedures for handling academic appeals and student complaints about the quality of learning opportunities; these procedures are fair, accessible and timely, and enable enhancement.**

**Quality Code, Chapter B9: Academic Appeals and Student Complaints**

**Findings**

2.81 The College has a student complaints procedure and an appeals against academic assessment decisions procedure. Both are in the process of being reviewed. The Academic Registrar reports on figures for complaints and appeals to the Academic Board on an annual basis. There is also a separate procedure for handling professional requirements cases.

2.82 The appeals procedure provides that students are notified of their right to appeal results in a letter sent after the publication of provisional results. The letter sets out procedure and deadlines. Following the outcome of an appeal, procedures set out that students are notified promptly in person or by telephone of the outcome of appeals, and receive results in writing. Students are encouraged by the College to seek advice on whether to make an appeal from their tutor or supervisor. The College also publishes a document online with general advice for appeals. Early resolution is encouraged in both complaints and appeals procedures. For appeals, this relates to simple administrative errors.

2.83 The College has a process in place for monitoring procedures, through annual reports from the Academic Registrar. Data are analysed every five years and their implications considered.

2.84 The College's procedures enable it to meet the Expectation.

2.85 The review team tested the College's procedures through examining existing procedures and through discussions with students, including students on joint programmes with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, and with College staff. The review team also scrutinised the information available to students through the College's published material on its public website, VLE and intranet.

2.86 Procedures are available in a single location on the College's external website, along with other academic policies and procedures. Data provided by the College indicates that complaints and appeals are dealt with in a timely manner. The College is currently reviewing its procedures and is working with student representatives to identify potential enhancements.

2.87 The review team considered that while the College's general Student Handbook, provided on RVC Learn, sets out the procedure for making a complaint, there was not a clear link between the handbook and the College's appeals procedures. Additionally, while the College has policies in place to cover appeals and complaints for students on joint programmes with the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the respective responsibilities of the two providers were not made clear to students. The review team therefore **recommends** that the College ensure that all students have appropriate and timely access to information on procedures for complaints and appeals.

2.88 Overall, the review team concludes that the Expectation is met. The College has procedures in place to meet the requirement of the Chapter and is encouraged to ensure that all students are made aware of these processes. A recommendation is made but this relates to a relatively small proportion of the College's provision and the associated level of risk remains low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**



**Expectation (B10): Degree-awarding bodies take ultimate responsibility for academic standards and the quality of learning opportunities, irrespective of where these are delivered or who provides them. Arrangements for delivering learning opportunities with organisations other than the degree-awarding body are implemented securely and managed effectively.**

**Quality Code, *Chapter B10: Managing Higher Education Provision with Others***

**Findings**

2.89 The College's strategy is to collaborate with other organisations where this enables the College to enhance its provision through specialist expertise or resources which it does not have, in full or part, in-house. The College engages in collaborative provision in the context of the University of London regulations, which make provision for the College to award a degree jointly with either a College awarding its own degrees or with an institution from outside the University of London. The College does not engage in accreditation or articulation agreements or in validation or franchising agreements beyond a foundation year.

2.90 Following a College review, and in light of the Quality Code, *Chapter B10*, the College has revised its collaborative provision procedures. Adherence to the revised procedures is to be reviewed on a regular basis.

2.91 Redevelopment of the Register of Collaborative Provision has also been undertaken in concert with efforts to more accurately define the scope and extent of the College's provision, which includes credit accumulation and transfer, joint awards, jointly delivered programmes, placements, study abroad (incoming), and support organisations. Study abroad (outbound) and short course versions of the Register are currently under development.

2.92 Since the 2009 Institutional Audit the College has strengthened administrative support for the quality assurance of collaborative provision, through the appointment of a Collaborative Programmes Officer and the formation of a collaborative provision subgroup of the Teaching Quality Committee.

2.93 The process for approving partnerships is set out in the revised collaborative provision procedures and draws on oversight by College departments, including Finance, Governance, Quality Assurance, human resources, Library and Information Services, to ensure both operational and strategic support is sufficient. The processes governing each collaborative arrangement are set out in the respective Memorandum of Agreement.

2.94 There is a two to five stage process (dependent on risk) for the design and approval of courses. The process includes consideration of a business plan, detailed risk management and due diligence, and a separate academic validation. New proposals are considered and approved by the Course Proposal and Development Group, consisting of members from senior management, the Teaching Learning and Assessment Committee (where appropriate and high risk), the Teaching Quality Committee (at the validation stage), and finally the Academic Board. Periodic review of due diligence and risk assessment is also addressed in the collaborative provision procedures.

2.95 The management of collaborative provision is consistent with non-collaborative provision, with operational management by a Course Management Committee reporting to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, and, ultimately, to the Academic Board (matters also being considered, where necessary, by the Teaching Quality Committee). Collaborative delivery partners are invited to membership of the appropriate Course Management Committee.



2.96 Assessment regulations and responsibilities that apply between the College and collaborative partners are documented in the Memorandum of Agreement. Similarly, the appointment and functions of the external examiners can also be found in the agreements.

2.97 The College's arrangements for managing higher education provision with others enable the Expectation to be met.

2.98 The review team tested the effectiveness of procedures by examining the College's Register of Collaborative Provision; regulations governing University of London awards; processes and procedures for managing collaborative provision; agreements with partners; minutes from key committees; and meetings with the Principal, senior, academic and support staff, and students. The review team also reviewed the procedures for managing work placements.

2.99 The process of establishing, reviewing and revising partnership activity is set out clearly in the revised collaborative procedures, and process for due diligence and risk assessment. The procedures apply to credit accumulation and transfer, joint awards, jointly delivered programmes, placements and inbound study abroad activity, as set out in the College's taxonomy of collaborative provision.

2.100 At the time of the review the collaborative provision subgroup of the Teaching Quality Committee had only recently been introduced. However, it was clear that collaborative provision contained within the collaborative register had been carefully considered by the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee as appropriate. It was also clear that the Academic Board considered the minutes from the Teaching Quality Committee and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, monitors validation and periodic review reports, and the recommendations thereof.

2.101 Memoranda of Agreements for the various forms of collaborative provision were further found to clearly set out the respective responsibilities of the partners and support arrangements for the students should either party withdraw from the arrangement.

2.102 Joint programmes comprising modules from each partner with associated assessment, award criteria and regulations were easily identified within programme specifications, course documentation and agreements as appropriate. Students whom the review team met were clear about the expectations of their programmes and associated grading systems.

2.103 Bachelor of Veterinary Medicine students are provided with detailed regulations governing their extramural studies. Students confirmed the use of a placement handbook and, although the student submission had expressed some concerns over the information contained within the Animal Husbandry Extramural Studies database, it was described as useful. Similarly, staff and students verified the support provided for the Veterinary Nurse placements and the role played by the Course Director in the process of Placement approval and oversight. Discussion on placements and an update by the placement Year Coordinator takes place at Course Management committees, and minutes from those meetings are received by the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. Placements are further discussed in Annual Quality Improvement Reports.

2.104 Overall, the review team found the College collaborative provision to be generally consistent with those of non-collaborative provision, and the examples considered by the team clearly align with the previous college frameworks for managing higher education provision with others. The revised policies and procedures in respect of collaborative provision are now in place and respond fully to the previous QAA review; however, due to

their recent introduction, it is not yet possible to assess their effectiveness over time. The review team concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**

**Level of risk: Low**

**Expectation (B11): Research degrees are awarded in a research environment that provides secure academic standards for doing research and learning about research approaches, methods, procedures and protocols. This environment offers students quality of opportunities and the support they need to achieve successful academic, personal and professional outcomes from their research degrees.**

### **Quality Code, *Chapter B11: Research Degrees***

#### **Findings**

2.105 The College's vibrant research environment for research degree students is supported by its research strategy, a key objective of which is to maintain a high level of research activity of international quality, with a laboratory infrastructure of the highest standard to attract international researchers and a development programme to enhance staff research skills.

2.106 Within the context of University of London regulations, the College has comprehensive regulations, policies and guidelines for the recruitment, supervision, progression, examination and degree awards, including complaints and appeals procedures. The College has a policy on Research with Integrity, and aims to improve student awareness of research integrity.

2.107 The College uses national benchmarks, including Research Council expectations of thesis submission and completion rates, and the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES), and has internal review processes, including annual appraisal, to monitor and enhance the quality of provision for research degree students.

2.108 The Research Degrees Committee has responsibility for the College's research degree provision and associated regulations, and recommends any amendments to the Academic Board for approval. The Research Degrees Committee maintains the College's Code of Practice for Postgraduate Research Degrees, which it reviews and updates annually, and is responsible for the research degrees examination process. This Committee also maintains oversight of resources available to research students. The Research Degrees Committee has four student members and three external members, who provide specialist input and advice on the range of research degree areas offered. The Graduate School, led by a senior academic, provides the central structure for the management of research degrees, including admissions, registration and induction, monitoring progress through annual appraisal, and examination.

2.109 The College has the necessary structures, strategies, policies and procedures to ensure that research degrees are awarded in a research environment that secures academic standards and encourages students' professional and personal development, thus meeting the Expectation.

2.110 To determine whether the Expectation is met, the review team held meetings with staff and students, and examined relevant documentation, including strategies, regulations, policies and procedures, committee minutes, and online resources

2.111 The admission processes for research students involves initial screening by the Graduate School followed by panel and supervisor interviews, and are informed by SPA (Supporting Professionalism in Admissions) guidelines. Minimum entry requirements, including English language proficiency, are in line with those of other higher education institutions. The admissions process is equitable and transparent and enables identification

of applicants with special needs who can be signposted to the appropriate student support services.

2.112 The Code of Practice outlines the expectations and requirements for successful completion of a PhD and is provided to research students at the offer stage, and to supervisors when a student is enrolled. Students receive the PhD Student Handbook and Student Log at induction, and all three documents are also accessible on the intranet.

2.113 New research students attend a compulsory two-day induction in October; those starting at other points during the academic year are required to attend an induction meeting with the Head of the Graduate School or Head of Postgraduate Administration. The Graduate School has introduced a peer-mentoring programme for new research students from 2012-13 in order to support their integration into the College. This is a voluntary scheme in which all new PhD students are offered an established postgraduate research student as a mentor, matched as far as possible to their field of study.

2.114 Supervisory teams have to meet the criteria specified in the Code of Practice. Training is provided for academic staff new to supervision of research students and there is a requirement for academic staff to complete a refresher course on research supervision every five years. It is College policy to have a primary and at least one other supervisor, one of whom must also be an experienced supervisor. The primary supervisor will be a College academic except in the case of a research student based entirely or primarily at a partner research institution where the College academic will be the co-supervisor. There is a policy for staff and students working off-site to ensure best practice in monitoring student placements/fieldwork and student-supervisor contact. Research students spoke positively about the role of their supervisory teams.

2.115 Heads of Departments are responsible for the allocation of academic staff responsibilities, and the sufficiency of time for research and research student supervision is discussed at annual appraisal. It is College policy that normally no academic should supervise more than six students as primary supervisor.

2.116 All PhD students are registered initially for the MPhil degree. Upgrading to PhD registration takes place at the end of the first year (pro rata for part-time study), subject to a successful appraisal of student progress.

2.117 The Graduate School maintains oversight of the Code of Practice, and is responsible for the Student Log, used by each student to record progress and training (including annual Learning Needs Analysis); the generic skills training programme; administration of the Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee; and publication of the PhD Student Handbook. Research students also have access to training opportunities offered by human resources and the Bloomsbury postgraduate skills network, as well as by external providers.

2.118 The Graduate School monitors the effectiveness of support for research students through reviewing the information provided by students on appraisal forms and through their participation in PRES. A points system was introduced in 2013-14 to improve monitoring of individual student's skills training, enabling supervisors and the Graduate School through the annual appraisal process and Student Log to see whether students complete the recommended 10 training days per year. Students are encouraged to adopt a reflective approach to their personal development in completing the Student Log. Research students spoke positively about the appraisal process in helping them to progress. The Postgraduate Academic Progress Committee deals with progression issues that are beyond the normal supervisory system.

2.119 Some research students have opportunities to participate in teaching, and workshops on teaching and learning, and on presentation skills, are included in the annual training programme, although attendance is not compulsory prior to research students being involved in teaching.

2.120 The progress of research students, in terms of annual appraisal reports, submission rates and examiners' reports, is monitored by the Head of the Graduate School and the Head of Postgraduate Administration, who report to the Research Degrees Committee, which also considers feedback from PRES. Action is taken where necessary to improve and enhance the student experience. If there are resource issues the Vice Principal Research & Innovation considers these. The College meets Research Councils UK benchmark of a 70 per cent submission rate. The College has recently introduced an annual consideration of data such as submission rates, an overview of joint examiner reports, and overview data arising from appraisal. The review team **affirms** the introduction of an annual review of student performance data for postgraduate research degree programmes.

2.121 Research degree examination criteria and outcomes are clearly available to staff, students and examiners, including an extranet for examiners. Research degree examining teams normally comprise one examiner from another college within the University of London, and one external to the University of London. Due to the College's specialist nature, the most appropriate internal examiner may on occasion be a member of the College's academic staff, and it may sometimes be necessary to appoint a third examiner to cover the breadth of a thesis. If the examination team does not have significant experience of PhD examining, the Research Degrees Committee will require an experienced College supervisor as an Independent Chair. Complaints and Appeals procedures are available on the intranet and are referred to in the Code of Practice.

2.122 The review team concludes that College's policies and procedures for the management of its research degree programmes, and the quality of its research provision, provides an environment that supports research students in their academic, personal and professional development. There are links from the College's provision for research students to three features of good practice: the extensive use of external expertise across all aspects of the management of standards and quality (Expectation A3.4); the integrated approach to student support provision, which enables a wide range of student needs to be met (Expectation B4); and the deliberate steps taken to build, sustain and enhance an environment which supports a high and effective level of engagement by all students in the management of learning opportunities (Expectation B5). The review team affirms the College's introduction of an annual review of student performance data for postgraduate research degree programmes. The review team concludes therefore that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

2.123 In reaching its judgement about the quality of student learning opportunities, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. All Expectations are met and risk is judged low in each case. Three recommendations are made in this judgement area. All three recommendations relate to instances of minor omissions or oversights and do not significantly impact on the level of risk. The three affirmations in this area relate to steps that the College has already taken to improve learning opportunities, but impact has yet to be evaluated. Four features of good practice are identified, covering six of the 11 expectations in this judgement area. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of student learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.

### 3 Judgement: The quality of the information about learning opportunities

**Expectation (C): UK higher education providers produce information for their intended audiences about the higher education they offer that is fit for purpose, accessible and trustworthy.**

#### **Quality Code, *Part C: Information about Higher Education Provision***

#### **Findings**

3.1 Responsibility for accuracy of published information lies with the Vice Principal Learning and Student Experience, the Vice Principal Research and Innovation and the Vice Principal Clinical Services. The College publishes information about its strategic and institutional policies, along with academic policies, on its external website in a single location. The website includes details on governance structures, which encompass responsibilities for maintaining standards and assuring quality.

3.2 The review team tested this Expectation by reading published College information, including: prospectuses and other marketing based information; web-based information about the College; student and staff handbooks; and guidance. The team met students and staff to discuss their evaluation of the published information.

3.3 Information for applicants is provided through the undergraduate prospectus and via the website. The College is introducing an annual postgraduate prospectus. Details of the study environment are made clear through publications and website content. The prospectus provides details of students' timetables and expected workload, including a 'typical day'. In addition to the prospectus, prospective applicants are provided with information through open days and taster days, and via promotional videos. The College's website includes Key Information Set data, and course outlines. The accreditation of courses is made clear in the prospectus. Details of student finance are made available on the College's website, in a specific Fees, Funds and Awards section.

3.4 The College makes use of social media to inform the public and prospective applicants of its activities. In addition, careers advisers and teachers are kept informed through regular newsletters.

3.5 Current students are provided with a Course Handbook, in addition to the general information provided on the College's VLE, RVC Learn. The College publishes a charter setting out the expectations the College has of its members. The Advice Centre also operates as a key point of information for students, particularly through providing induction talks to new students.

3.6 Upon completion of their programme of study, students are provided with a transcript. In the 2014-15 academic year these will, for the first time, be released simultaneously with examination results.

3.7 Overall, the College provides information in a wide variety of forms that are clear and accessible. Information is judged by those accessing it to be trustworthy. The review team concludes that the Expectation is therefore met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The quality of the information about learning opportunities: Summary of findings

3.8 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. The one Expectation for this judgement area is met and the associated level of risk is low. One recommendation relating to Expectation B9 also relates to this area but impacts on a small area of provision and is capable of being promptly and straightforwardly addressed. The review team therefore concludes that the quality of the information about learning opportunities **meets** UK expectations.



## 4 Judgement: The enhancement of student learning opportunities

**Expectation (Enhancement): Deliberate steps are being taken at provider level to improve the quality of students' learning opportunities.**

### Findings

4.1 Enhancement is embedded in all the processes for quality assurance. Templates for annual monitoring and periodic review prompt academic managers to consider improvements to the student experience, and the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy now focuses on enhancement and sets out the deliberate steps taken by the College. It covers the more traditional methods of learning and teaching, as well as a section on the technological enhancement of learning.

4.2 The LIVE CETL is an important catalyst for enhancement, and the details of this centre can be found on the College website. The College has taken the decision to self-fund this centre following the withdrawal of HEFCE funding, which demonstrates its commitment to the improvement of the student learning opportunities.

4.3 Strategies for the estates, human resources, e-learning and IT all acknowledge the importance of the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy. The strategic approach has been planned and a timeline has been produced in the agenda for implementation.

4.4 The Teaching, Learning and Assessment Committee takes institutional oversight of Enhancement, and agrees upon an annual implementation plan that will be delivered through College-wide projects and course level initiatives. The Vice Principal Learning and Student Experience makes an annual report to the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee, and Academic Board, detailing the progress. The College further produces an annual University of London Quality Enhancement Overview Report, which draws on College Annual Quality Improvement Reports.

4.5 A strategic approach is taken to managing the processes of enhancement that allows deliberate steps to be planned and executed, and which are designed to improve and enhance the learning opportunities for students. Quality assurance processes act as a primary focus for the initiation of enhancement; enhancement being a feature of course design, approval and delivery as well as featuring in monitoring and review processes.

4.6 The strategy and associated processes enable the Expectation to be met.

4.7 In testing the evidence the review team examined strategy and policy documents, as well as the minutes of relevant committees such as the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee. They also scrutinised course approval, review and monitoring documents and explored the LIVE CETL web pages. Meetings with staff and students provided the opportunity for the review team to discuss the implementation of the College's strategic approach.

4.8 There was clear evidence in quality assurance policies and procedures that enhancement is considered and promoted at module, course, department and subject level. Records from the College's main academic committees demonstrate that there is both strategic direction and College-level monitoring of its enhancement activity.

4.9 The College provided examples of a highly effective range of planned and coordinated enhancement activity. Three particular examples of strategic led enhancement illustrate the extent and range of the College's enhancement activity.

4.10 Firstly, the College has established a Technology Club, which uses students to help other students with IT and e-learning. An e-Media Unit has been established, which encourages student-led initiatives. Projects include: developing computer aided formative assessments, which students can use to test their understanding of the curriculum in their own time; establishing student focus groups in all year cohorts, with regular meetings to elicit feedback on existing e-learning provision; identifying needs for future development; and the production of video casts, podcasts and post casts to enhance anatomical teaching.

4.11 Secondly, the online Clinical Skills Centre helps to prepare students for clinical veterinary procedures; the site is a portal for supporting resources, and contains short videos and skill sheets relating to Day One Clinical Skills that students will be expected to become proficient at before they graduate as a vet or veterinary nurse. The resources are regularly added to and updated.

4.12 Thirdly, the LIVE CETL provides a substantial evidence base that supports the College's strategic enhancement activity. The LIVE CETL, which is a portal to 33 other enhancement resources, including: peer assisted learning; veterinary nursing academic writing; Day One Skills online and communication skills training; and a site where students can go to find out the latest news and developments in veterinary medicine. The effective contribution the LIVE CETL makes to the enhancement of student learning is **good practice**.

4.13 Enhancement activities also include partnership in the Higher Education Academy's enhancement programmes, including: employability, supporting individual recognition and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey. A range of professional development activities are coordinated by the Director of Academic Staff Development and include expectation of completion of the Higher Education Academy accredited Postgraduate Certificate in Veterinary Education or Postgraduate Certificate in Academic Practice qualifications for all staff.

4.14 External evidence using Destination of Leavers from Higher Education data, has influenced decisions on enhancing the Career Service provision and the greater prominence of employability skills in the Learning, Teaching and Assessment Enhancement Strategy (2014-19).

4.15 The College has a clear and embedded strategic approach to enhancing learning opportunities. There is a strong ethos of enhancement at all levels and there are widespread examples of enhancement activity. Student engagement in the College's approach to enhancement is strong. The review team therefore concludes that the Expectation is met and the associated level of risk is low.

**Expectation: Met**  
**Level of risk: Low**

## The enhancement of student learning opportunities: Summary of findings

4.16 In reaching its judgement, the review team matched its findings against the criteria specified in Annex 2 of the published handbook. There are no recommendations or affirmations. A feature of good practice is specifically identified in this judgement but features of good practice in other areas, for example Expectations B3, B4, and B5, also recognise the effective approach taken by the College to enhancing student learning opportunities. The College has a strategic approach to enhancing student learning opportunities, which is effectively put into operation, and there is an overall ethos of continuous improvement. The review team concludes that the range and depth of enhancement activities taking place at the College, and their significant impact on the learning opportunities available to students, go beyond the expectations of the Quality Code; the enhancement of student learning opportunities is therefore **commended**.

## 5 Commentary on the Theme: Student Involvement in Quality Assurance and Enhancement

### Findings

5.1 One of the objectives of the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Strategy (2013-18) is to amplify the impact of student engagement, and continue to gather student views through: questionnaire surveys; input to committees; participation in periodic reviews; student feedback forums; liaison with Students' Union representatives; and informal feedback through the tutorial systems. The strategy has identified KPIs, which are considered at the Teaching Quality Committee.

5.2 The College and the Students' Union recognise the need to foster a culture of student engagement from entry and have delivered briefing sessions to all new undergraduate students to outline what is involved and encourage participation. The impact of these interventions is yet to be evaluated, however staff commented on a significant increase in the level of activity in engaging students in college life.

5.3 From 2013, the College has funded a full-time General Manager appointment in the Students' Union, to enable a more focused approach to student engagement and representation, and provide greater continuity in student representation and support. The College has also appointed an Academic Quality Officer (Student Engagement), and the student submission and staff met by the review team cite the new position of Associate Dean of Student Engagement as a positive development for enhancing student representation.

5.4 Students are involved in quality assurance representation on the Academic Board; Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee; Teaching Quality Committee; Research Degrees Committee; College Services Forum; and Course Management Committees and working groups relating to the quality of teaching, assessment and learning opportunities.

5.5 The College has recently established five subcommittees/working groups of the Teaching Quality Committee: the Student Surveys Strategy Working Group; the Student Surveys Results Working Group; the Collaborative Provision Subgroup; the External Examiner Reports Subgroup; and the Annual Quality Improvement Reports Subgroup. Students have representation on all, except the Collaborative Provision Subcommittee.

5.6 Students provide further feedback to the College through student representatives on Course Management Committees; the tutorial system, which allows for discussion on course-related issues; module and strand surveys; and staff-teaching surveys. Undergraduate and postgraduate students commented on the extensive opportunities to give feedback during every lecture and module; how they could find details of their student representatives on the course home page; the ability to share issues via emails to their representatives on topics for discussion; and how the representatives would inform them of outcomes. The students further commented on how issues raised are taken seriously; the College operates a 'You Said, We Did' system and could give specific example of changes in response to student feedback.

5.7 All student representatives are invited to attend a spring and summer term social event jointly organised by the Students' Union and the College to share experiences, develop contacts and case studies, and identify College-wide issues with examples provided in the student written submission of changes in response to these events.

5.8 The College and Students' Union are building on their existing training for student representatives with the launch of a new programme comprising three elements: induction training, leadership skills training and social activities. The staff and students met by the

review team spoke positively about the training, and as a result noted an increase in the number of applications for the various representative positions, with representatives more effective in their role.

5.9 Students also provide feedback as part of course and periodic review through meeting with the panels, and discussion on periodic review takes place at Course Management committees. In response to a review of the programme review process it is expected that one student appointed by the Teaching Quality Committee will be a full member of the panel, with training and induction to take place during 2014-15.

5.10 The College actively involves students in developing resources that facilitate delivery of the curriculum, and this approach is most established in the College's e-Media Unit, which involves students in developing e-learning and employs Student Learning Technologists. Several examples were provided, and the students and support staff met by the review team confirmed a high level of involvement with the e-Media Unit and the Clinical Skills Centre.

5.11 Overall, the College is taking deliberate steps to engage all students formally through its student representative systems on all committees, and involvement in periodic reviews. The College is further establishing measures to test the effectiveness of student engagement through the setting and monitoring of KPIs.

## Glossary

This glossary is a quick-reference guide to terms in this report that may be unfamiliar to some readers. Definitions of key operational terms are also given on pages 29-32 of the [Higher Education Review handbook](#)

If you require formal definitions of other terms please refer to the section on assuring standards and quality: [www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/assuring-standards-and-quality)

User-friendly explanations of a wide range of terms can be found in the longer **Glossary** on the QAA website: [www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Pages/GlossaryEN.aspx)

### Academic standards

The standards set by **degree-awarding bodies** for their courses (programmes and modules) and expected for their awards. See also **threshold academic standard**.

### Award

A qualification, or academic credit, conferred in formal recognition that a student has achieved the intended **learning outcomes** and passed the assessments required to meet the academic standards set for a **programme** or unit of study.

### Blended learning

Learning delivered by a number of different methods, usually including face-to-face and e-learning (see **technology enhanced or enabled learning**).

### Credit(s)

A means of quantifying and recognising learning, used by most institutions that provide higher education **programmes of study**, expressed as numbers of credits at a specific level.

### Degree-awarding body

A UK higher education provider (typically a university) with the power to award degrees, conferred by Royal Charter, or under Section 76 of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992, or under Section 48 of the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 1992, or by Papal Bull, or, since 1999, granted by the Privy Council on advice from QAA (in response to applications for taught degree awarding powers, research degree awarding powers or university title).

### Distance learning

A course of study that does not involve face-to-face contact between students and tutors but instead uses technology such as the internet, intranets, broadcast media, CD-ROM and video, or traditional methods of correspondence - learning 'at a distance'.

See also **blended learning**.

### Dual award or double award

The granting of separate awards (and certificates) for the same **programme** by two **degree-awarding bodies** who have jointly delivered the programme of study leading to them. See also **multiple award**.

### e-learning

See technology enhanced or enabled learning

### **Enhancement**

The process by which higher education providers systematically improve the quality of provision and the ways in which students' learning is supported. It is used as a technical term in our review processes.

### **Expectations**

Statements in the **Quality Code** that set out what all UK higher education providers expect of themselves and each other, and what the general public can therefore expect of them.

### **Flexible and distributed learning**

A programme or module that does not require the student to attend classes or events at particular times and locations.

See also **distance learning**.

### **Framework**

A published formal structure. See also **framework for higher education qualifications**.

### **Framework for higher education qualifications**

A published formal structure that identifies a hierarchy of national qualification levels and describes the general achievement expected of holders of the main qualification types at each level, thus assisting higher education providers in maintaining academic standards. QAA publishes the following frameworks: *The Framework for Higher Education Qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (FHEQ) and *The Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education Institutions in Scotland* (FQHEIS).

### **Good practice**

A process or way of working that, in the view of a QAA review team, makes a particularly positive contribution to a higher education provider's management of academic standards and the quality of its educational provision. It is used as a technical term in QAA's audit and review processes.

### **Learning opportunities**

The provision made for students' learning, including planned study, teaching, assessment, academic and personal support, and resources (such as libraries and information systems, laboratories or studios).

### **Learning outcomes**

What a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completing a process of learning.

### **Multiple awards**

An arrangement where three or more **degree-awarding bodies** together provide a single jointly delivered **programme** (or programmes) leading to a separate **award** (and separate certification) of each awarding body. The arrangement is the same as for **dual/double awards**, but with three or more awarding bodies being involved.

### **Operational definition**

A formal definition of a term, establishing exactly what QAA means when using it in reviews and reports.

### **Programme (of study)**

An approved course of study that provides a coherent learning experience and normally leads to a qualification.

### **Programme specifications**

Published statements about the intended **learning outcomes** of programmes of study, containing information about teaching and learning methods, support and assessment methods, and how individual units relate to levels of achievement.

### **Public information**

Information that is freely available to the public (sometimes referred to as being 'in the public domain').

### **Quality Code**

Short term for the UK Quality Code for Higher Education, which is the UK-wide set of **reference points** for higher education providers (agreed through consultation with the higher education community, and published by QAA), which states the **Expectations** that all providers are required to meet.

### **Reference points**

Statements and other publications that establish criteria against which performance can be measured.

### **Subject Benchmark Statement**

A published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to Bachelor's degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity.

### **Technology enhanced or enabled learning (or e-learning)**

Learning that is delivered or supported through the use of technology.

### **Threshold academic standard**

The minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic **award**. Threshold academic standards are set out in the national **frameworks** and **Subject Benchmark Statements**.

### **Virtual learning environment (VLE)**

An intranet or password-only interactive website (also referred to as a platform or user interface) giving access to **learning opportunities** electronically. These might include such resources as Course Handbooks, information and reading lists; blogs, message boards and forums; recorded lectures; and/or facilities for online seminars (webinars).

### **Widening participation**

Increasing the involvement in higher education of people from a wider range of backgrounds.

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